

Editorial Comment

CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF THE FORUM

The Folklore Forum is now entering its second decade and has developed from its original newsletter-like format into a fairly sophisticated and professional journal. During this process, however, some of the reasons for its existence appear to have fallen by the wayside. While I was working on the upcoming index of the past ten volumes, I noticed a certain trend in the content and authorship of the articles; the emphasis has shifted from the student's inquiry to the scholar's statement. Although articles and commentary from the more distinguished members of the academic community add a touch of class and an aura of respectability, the primary focus should be on the student population from which and for which the journal is published. The Folklore Forum is intended to be exactly what its name implies-- a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas relevant to the study of folklore.

Articles such as have appeared in the last few years do indeed fulfill part of that intention via public dissemination of folkloristic theory, technique, and analytic tools as they are developed and used by both students and established scholars. Providing an outlet for student publication is only one facet of the Forum. An equally important function is to make available a public arena for consideration of controversial ideas and approaches which concern the student in the daily grind of taking classes and writing papers, theses, and dissertations, in short, the problems encountered in the general preparation for a career as a professional folklorist. In these days of multitudinous theoretical approaches, it is certainly not enough to latch hold of one appealing concept and proceed to analyse all materials only within its particular scope. Whatever position is adopted should be subject to thorough critical

examination and be regarded in its potential relationship to other theories. One student alone cannot adequately do such analysis, and though input of this sort does come from our instructors, one of the most profitable means of exploration is through intellectual exchange with fellow students. This is done, in fact, on a small group basis, but the ideas and arguments generated therein are rarely communicated to the body of folklore students as a whole. I would like to see the Folklore Forum return to this type of exchange as a primary concern and continue to be a publication for the student and about the student as well as by the student.

A question that was considered in the early issues of the Forum is one which still concerns us all--what exactly is folklore? Or rather, what do we think it is? We may no longer believe that it is the study of popular antiquities or the product of a singing, dancing throng, but what we do believe it to be is not always clear. Many prominent scholars in our field have advanced their own views of the materials and scope proper to folkloristic investigation, but they do not all agree. It is important for us, as the next generation of scholars, to carefully consider what the study of folklore encompasses and what it excludes. Evaluation of the problem should include both the theory and the analytical tools borrowed from related disciplines. It seems to me to be central to the vitality of a discipline for its practitioners to have working knowledge of the major premises in operation. I would like to see at least one issue of Folklore Forum devoted to students' perceptions of the realm of folklore and its boundaries. If potential contributors feel qualms about putting their names to apparently heretical statements and suggestions, it is possible to identify authors by pseudonyms or initials. (The editors would request full identification for purposes of response and eventual blackmail.) The goal of this endeavor would not be to air your discontent but rather to express intellectual concern with the possibility of critical and supportive commentary.

In addition to a reconsideration of the bases for our academic pursuits, I would like to suggest two other topics that have been under discussion among the rank and file. First, even if we had a well-defined notion of subject matter, there is always the problem of solicitation of this material (that is, fieldwork). With the development of new theoretical approaches has come a greater concern for the people who are at the source of our studies. Questions of methodology and ethics occurs not only in every fieldwork class, but in other folklore classes, especially those which deal with groups close to or within our own society. Although an issue concerned with fieldwork is already scheduled under the direction of Inta Carpenter, it would be a worthwhile undertaking to further examine the problems that students face in their first ventures into the field.

Second, the 1978 AFS meeting proved to be an interesting occasion, given the controversy which accompanied the selection of site. Reports and impressions of the meeting as a whole, the individual panels, and the results of the business meeting and graduate student caucus are of interest to the entire folklore community. Similar commentary on other folkloric congresses would also be of value.

We would appreciate contributions along all these lines. If these suggestions are well received, the Folklore Forum is prepared to establish a section for readers' commentaries on articles, to appear in the issue published after the article in question appeared in print. Remember that, unlike other journals, the Folklore Forum is designed for the expression of your ideas and for the encouragement of intellectual debate.

Virginia Ann Polioudakis Lowe
Assistant Editor